DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 420 SO 024 647

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TITLE Motivational Influences on Adolescents' Current Events Knowledge.
PUB DATE Feb 94
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence (San Diego, CA, February 1994). This research was funded by a grant from Whittle Communications.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Behavioral Science Research; *Current Events; Elementary School Students; High Schools; High School Students; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; Junior High School Students; *Learning Motivation; Middle Schools; *Social Studies; *Student Interests
IDENTIFIERS Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a study that examined relationships among students' goals, efficacy beliefs, news-seeking behavior, and current events knowledge. The study expands on previous work on students' achievement related goals by examining the effects of goals and self-efficacy on knowledge of current events, a sub-domain of social studies. A sample of students from four middle schools and nine high schools (n=1148) completed a current events test, and a motivational inventory in May 1993. The sample was 50 percent male and 50 percent female, and 55 percent of the students studied current events in school as part of a course. Using path analysis, the researchers found that males in middle schools are more self-efficacious toward the news, while males in high schools are more performance oriented and seek news outside of school more than females. The study found that grade point average (GPA) is related positively to holding mastery goals toward the news for high school, but not middle school students. In both samples, mastery and performance goals only have indirect effects on knowledge, through either efficacy beliefs or news seeking behavior. In both samples, students who study current events in school are less mastery oriented than those who do not study the news in school (Author/DK)

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Paper presented at the meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence, San Diego, CA, February 1994. Thanks for comments on earlier versions of this work to Martin Maehr and Evelyn Brzezynski. Special thanks to Deanna Migut for assistance in every aspect of this project. This research was funded by a grant from Whittle Communications. Please address all correspondence to Eric M. Anderman, 5116 Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

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Abstract

This study examines relationships among students' goals, efficacy beliefs, news-seeking behavior, and current events knowledge. A sample of students from four middle schools and nine high schools (N=1148) completed a current events test, and a motivational inventory in May 1993. Using path analysis, we found that males in middle schools are more self-efficacious toward the news, while males in high schools are more performance oriented and seek news outside of school more than females. We also found that GPA is positively related to holding mastery goals toward the news for high school, but not middle school students. In both samples, mastery and performance goals only have indirect effects on knowledge, through either efficacy beliefs or news-seeking behavior. In both samples, students who study current events in school are less mastery oriented than those who do not study the news in school.

The importance of achievement goals as determinants of the quality of motivation has been documented in numerous studies and sources (e.g., Ames & Archer, 1988; Anderman & Maehr, in press; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Maehr & Pintrich, 1991). In particular, researchers have identified two primary goal orientations which play a role in achievement motivation: a "mastery" goal orientation is indicative of wanting to understand and master the task at hand, while a "performance" goal orientation is indicative of wanting to demonstrate one's ability. Yet research has been limited in examining the ways in which students' goal orientations operate within specific academic domains.

The present study expands on previous work on students' achievement related goals by examining the effects of goals and self-efficacy on knowledge of current events, a sub-domain of social studies. It is important to understand the factors that influence students' current events knowledge, considering recent reports suggesting that American adolescents know little about history, geography, and civics (e.g., NAEP, 1990).

Sample Description and Procedures

The sample consists of 1148 students from nine high schools and four middle schools from a range of settings around the U.S.A. A random sample of approximately 100 students from each school completed a current events test, and questionnaires assessing goals and efficacy beliefs, based on the *Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey* (Midgley, Maehr, & Urdan, 1993), during the spring of 1993.

- 55% of the students study current events in school as part of a course.
- The sample is 50% male and 50% female.

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- The sample is 75% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, 2% African American, and 5% Asian American.
- 69% of the students are in high school, and 31% are in middle school.

Scales and Sample Items

Scales and sample items are presented in table 1.. All alphas exceed .60.

Table 1: Scales and Alphas

Mastery Goals	**Alpha=.77** *Understanding the news -- what's happening in the world -- is important to me.* *I pay attention to what is happening on the news because I enjoy it.* *Listening to the news is boring.**
Performance Goals	**Alpha=.70** *Knowing more than other students about what is going on in the world is important to me.* *I like to show that I know more about national and world news than other students.*
Self-Efficacy	**Alpha=.77** *Even if the news is hard, I can learn it.* *I'm certain I can understand any news story if I try.* *If I have enough time, I can understand even the hardest news stories.*
News Seeking Behavior†	**Alpha=.84** *The World Trade Center bombing.* *The role of gays and women in the military.* *The fighting in Bosnia-Herzegovina* *Changes in Russia* *The famine and relief efforts in Somalia* *The Rodney King Trial in Los Angeles* *The trouble Bill Clinton had choosing a new attorney general.* *The Branch Davidian standoff in Waco, Texas.*

†Scale indicates frequency of stories read or seen.

Correlations among these scales, school type (middle or high school), gender, and whether or not the student studies current events in school are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Zero Order Correlations*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Current Events Knowledge	–								
2. News Seeking Behavior	.27	–							
3. Self Efficacy	.27	.38	–						
4. Performance Orientation	.08	.19	.38	–					
5. Mastery Goal Orientation	.20	.43	.48	.41	–				
6. Grade Point Average	.20	.15	.20	.00	.14	–			
7. School Type	.19	.06	.02	-.08	-.04	-.10	–		
8. Gender	.03	.11	.09	.13	.01	-.14	-.03	–	
9. Study News in School	-.06	-.11	-.09	-.04	-.16	-.08	.12	.01	–

Gender: 0=Female, 1=Male; Study News: 0=No, 1=Yes; School Type: 0=Middle School, 1=High School.

We used path analysis to examine multivariate relationships. Results for the middle and high school samples are presented in Figure 1 and 2.

For the middle school sample, students with higher GPAs are more likely to seek news at home, to be self-efficacious, and to know more news stories. Males are more self-efficacious than females. In addition, students who study current events in school are less mastery oriented toward the news. Mastery goals are related to higher levels of efficacy, and greater out of school news-seeking behavior. Performance goals are related to higher levels of efficacy.

For the high school sample, students with higher GPAs are more likely to seek news at home, to be self-efficacious, to be mastery oriented, and to know more news stories. Males are more performance oriented, and seek news outside of school more than females. Students who study current events in school are less mastery oriented toward the news than their peers. Mastery goals are related to higher levels of self-efficacy, and greater out of school news-seeking behavior. Performance goals are related to higher levels of efficacy.

There are certain similarities and differences between the two samples. Self-efficacy, GPA, and news-seeking behavior have direct effects on knowledge for both samples. Males in middle school are more self-efficacious, while males in high school are more performance oriented and seek news more often outside of school. GPA is positively related to holding mastery goals for high school students, but not for middle school students.

Discussion

The present study demonstrates the utility of achievement goals in the understanding of students' news seeking behavior and knowledge. In particular, we found that students who study current events in school are less mastery oriented toward the news than their peers. Nevertheless, holding

mastery goals is strongly related to news-seeking behavior at home. We believe that this is an important finding, since it specifically links cognitive goals to specific behaviors.

We also found that students who are performance oriented are somewhat more self-efficacious at understanding the news. This is an intriguing finding which deserves further investigation, since much research stresses the negative impact of performance goals on learning and achievement (see Anderman & Maehr, in press, for a review). Finally, we found that males have higher efficacy beliefs in middle school, and higher performance goals and news-seeking behavior than females in high school.

Future studies should investigate in more detail the roles that goals play in determining behaviors. The results of the present study are particularly important, since they inform teachers about how and why students might choose to learn about current events. In a world that is rampant with disease, war, and crime, it is important to inculcate in adolescents the desire to seek and appreciate knowledge about news events.

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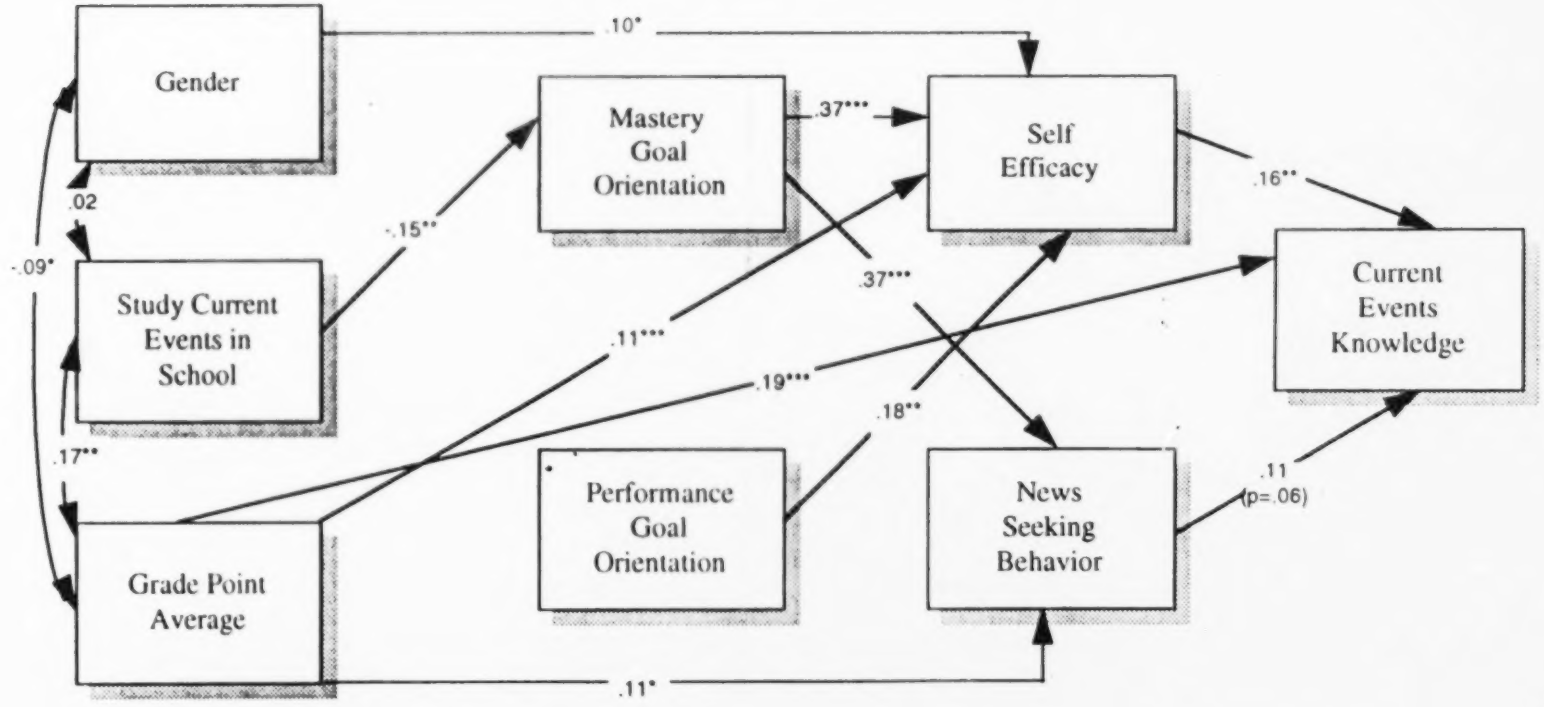
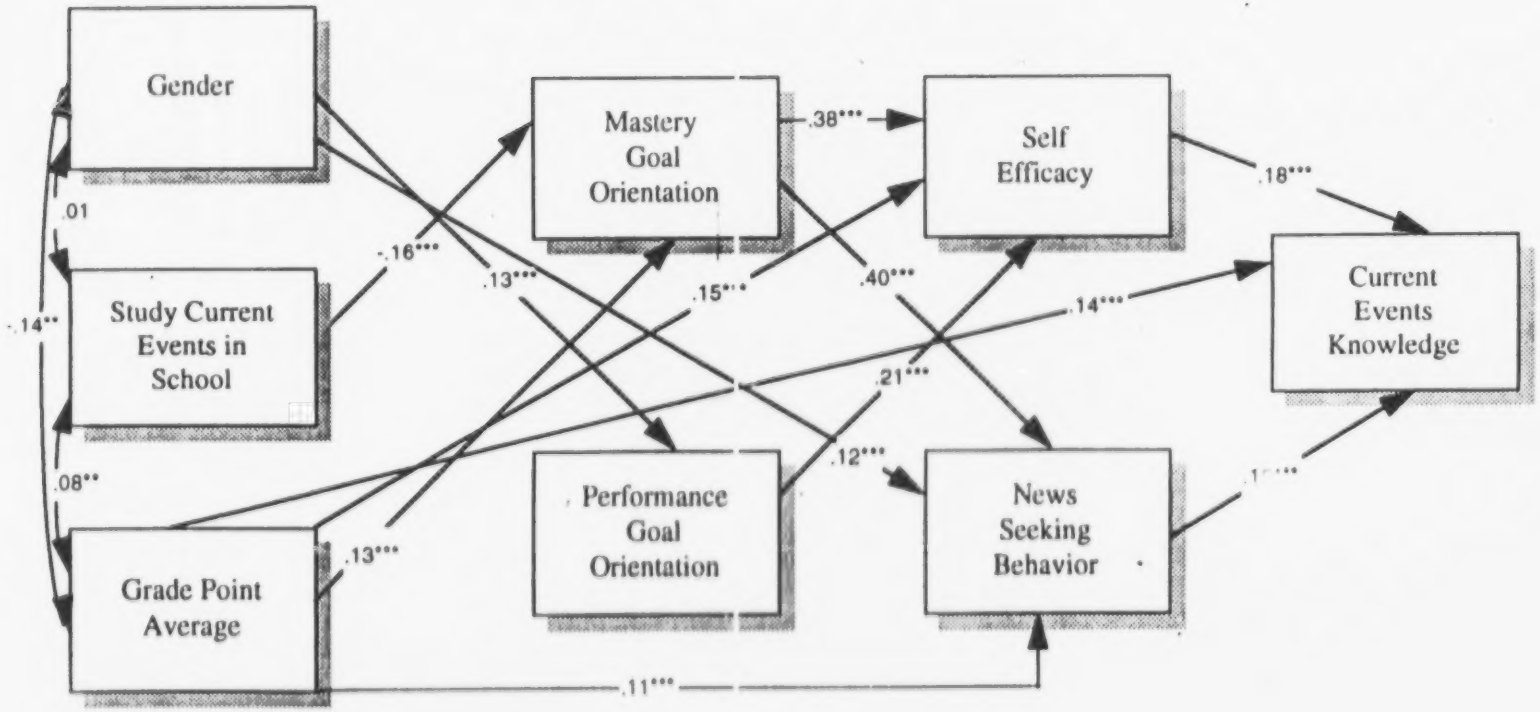
Figure 1: Path Analysis Predicting Current Events Knowledge, Middle School Sample, R^2=.12, p<.001



Gender: 0=Female, 1=Male
Study Current Events: 0=No, 1=Yes
*p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Figure 2: Path Analysis Predicting Current Events Knowledge, High School Sample, R^2=.15, p<.001



Gender: 0=Female, 1=Male
Study Current Events: 0=No, 1=Yes
*p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001